

**THINK ABOUT IT ... Choose the correct answer:**

1. The icon of the Theotokos of Tenderness shows us her:
  - A. Protection
  - B. Comfort
  - C. Love
  - D. All of the above
2. What shows us that the Theotokos is Holy?
  - A. The golden braid on her veil and robe
  - B. The stars on her veil and robe
  - C. The color blue of her clothing
  - D. All of the above
3. The stars on the veil and robe of the Theotokos represent:
  - A. The Cross
  - B. The four corners of the earth illuminated by Christ
  - C. God's Uncreated Light
  - D. All of the above
4. In icons, the color gold represents:
  - A. God's Divine Light
  - B. Christ, the Sun of Righteousness
  - C. Holiness
  - D. All of the above
5. The blue color of the Theotokos' clothing represents:
  - A. Earth
  - B. Flowers
  - C. Heaven
  - D. The Ocean
6. In icons, the symbol of a "firebrand" represents:
  - A. The Uncreated Light of God
  - B. The Divine Fire of God
  - C. God's Love
  - D. All of the above
7. In the icon, the Theotokos shows that she leads us to Christ by:
  - A. Touching Christ's golden girdle with her hand
  - B. Looking directly at us
  - C. Wearing a green robe
  - D. Keeping her head covered

**The Pskov-Pechersk Icon of  
The Most Holy Mother of God  
"Umilenie" (Tenderness) Icon of the Theotokos**



**"O Holy Theotokos, pray unto God for us."**

## WHAT DO WE SEE IN THE TENDERNESS ICON?

The **Pskov-Pechersk Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God** (also called “**The Tenderness Icon of the Mother of God**”) is famous for defending the city of Pskov and the Pskov Caves monastery several times. When the people prayed to the Theotokos while standing before this icon, she protected the city and the monastery. She first protected them from an invading army in 1581 (celebrated on May 21.) She also protected the city and monastery in 1812 during the invasion by Napoleon (celebrated on October 7.)

In Pskov Caves icon of the Theotokos of Tenderness, the Virgin Mary holds the Christ child in her arms so that His right side is next to her heart. Christ’s left arm hugs across her veil, and His right arm is under the veil and his fingers hug her neck. In this way, both the Theotokos and Christ show us their **tenderness, comfort, and love.**

The Theotokos wears her **veil** over her head. In icons, a woman’s veil is a symbol of her **purity.** In this icon, the Theotokos’ veil and robe flow past her shoulders and across the body of the Christ child, symbolizing her **pure love.**

On the veil on her forehead we see a **star**, and also one on her shoulder. The star represents the Star of Bethlehem when Christ was born from the Virgin Mary. The shape of each star is also a **Cross** with four points. There is a **square** at the center of the star. The four points of the Cross and the square are there to remind people of the **four corners of the earth illuminated by Christ** who came into the world through the Holy Theotokos.

Within each star, also in a cross design are four symbols that are called **firebrands**, the symbols of **God’s Uncreated Light**, which is also called the **Divine Fire.** The Divine Fire is **God’s love.** The Theotokos brought this love to us by giving birth to Christ.

The stars and crosses are always painted in **gold.** Gold represents the Holiness of **God’s Divine Light.** The **golden braid** at the edges of her veil and robe shows that the Theotokos is filled with the **Divine Light.**

In this icon, the Theotokos’ veil is painted **blue.** Blue is a symbol of **Heaven** and **Eternity.** In the Virgin Mary Heaven and earth met when she accepted to become the Mother of Christ our God. When He became incarnate through her, the Cross became his destiny from the first moment of His conception. He died upon the cross and rose from the dead to make it possible for us to have **Eternal Life** with Him in Heaven.

In this icon of the Theotokos, **her eyes** are sad. She does not look toward us. She looks away to **behold the world of Eternity.** She had heard, on the fortieth day after Christ’s birth, the words of Saint Simeon: “a sword shall pierce your own soul.” (Luke 2:35). She knows who her Son is and what will happen to Him when he grows up. The “sword” that will pierce her soul is the sadness she will feel when she sees her Son, Christ die on the Cross.

Christ’s cheek is pressed to His mother’s cheek. **Christ’s eyes** look toward His mother, **comforting her** in her sadness. He will say to her many years later, “Do not cry for me, Mother, when you see me in the tomb. Because I, your Son, whom you conceived in your womb without seed, will rise from the dead and be glorified.” (Odion 6, from the Great Saturday Canon). This reminds us that although Christ died on the Cross (commemorated on Good Friday), we rejoice with the Theotokos on the day of Christ’s Resurrection (Pascha). It all became possible through love.

In the icon, Christ is a small child, but He wears a robe in the style of an adult and a **“girdle” with golden threads** around his waist and over his shoulder. The golden threads are like rays of the sun, because Christ is **the Sun of Righteousness, the Giver of Light.**

The **Theotokos’ hand** is outstretched to touch the upper edge of Christ’s girdle, which shows that **she guides the people and leads us to Christ.**

The Theotokos always hears everyone who prays for her intercession (her prayers to God to help us). She does this because of love. Just as she cradled the Christ child in her arms giving Him all her love and comfort, **she loves everyone who loves Christ,** just as God the Father loves us. Christ tells us this, “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.” (John 16:27)

The Theotokos, by her example of tenderness, teaches us to also treat one another with tenderness and love. What does she want us to understand about tenderness?

Tenderness is not weakness. Tenderness shows **the strength of love.** Christ teaches and commands us to love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Gospel of Luke 10:27)